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S E C R E T RANGOON 001374

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA; HANOI FOR EAP DAS  
HUHTALA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [BM](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: BURMESE JUNTA CHIEF TO SEEK INDIAN ENLIGHTENMENT?

REF: A. RANGOON 1370 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. 03 RANGOON 1452

[1](#)C. SECSTATE 225960

[1](#)D. NEW DELHI 6040 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Despite a week of significant political change in Burma, we have seen no signs that SPDC Chairman Senior General Than Shwe plans to cancel a trip planned to India on October 24. If Than Shwe travels as planned, it would be an additional sign that the SPDC has effected a seamless, and bloodless, ouster of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt as well as further indication of rapidly warming Burma-India relations. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Despite a week of tumultuous political change in Burma, including the dramatic ouster of Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt, we have seen no signs that SPDC Chairman Senior General Than Shwe plans to cancel his upcoming trip to India. Sources within the Government of Burma, and at the Indian Embassy in Rangoon, tell us that Than Shwe will depart Rangoon, as scheduled, on Sunday October 24 for a five-day trip to New Delhi and several upcountry sites.

[1](#)3. (C) The trip, if it takes place, will be Than Shwe's first to India and the first visit of a Burmese Head of State in over 20 years (former dictator Ne Win visited India in 1980). The GOB characteristically has not released a delegation list, but sources indicate that dozens of senior government and military officials will join the entourage as well as several Than Shwe family members.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The 71-year old Senior General is an infrequent traveler, and rarely ventures outside out Burma. His last foreign trip was to China in January 2003. By all accounts, his planned trip to India is entirely motivated by a personal desire to see the neighboring country before he dies. Reportedly, highlights of trip will include visits to holy Buddhist sites, including a pilgrimage to Buddha-gaya, the birthplace of Buddha in Utter Pradesh. The Indian Embassy also adds that Than Shwe is expected to meet with President Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and Minister of External Affairs Natwar Singh.

[1](#)5. (S) GOB sources, and the Indian Embassy, have downplayed expectations that the trip will produce any deliverables. However, according to secret GOB documents, at least one ministry (Communications, Posts, and Telegraphs) expects the trip to result in the implementation of several dozen projects envisioned in an August 2003 MOU between the two countries. The projects include cooperation, and Indian assistance, in a variety of technical areas, mostly involving information technology. An additional priority for the GOB is implementation of projects under an existing Indian soft loan of over \$10 million.

[1](#)6. (C) Comment: If Than Shwe travels as planned, it would be an additional sign that the SPDC has effected a seamless, and bloodless, ouster of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt and is comfortable enough to continue with regime business as usual (ref A). The trip would also be a further indication of rapidly warming Burma-India relations, highlighted by a 2003 visit to Rangoon by Indian Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat (ref B) and, in the interim, a plethora of senior-level exchanges. India's "Look East" policy (ref C), placing a priority on economic and security goals and on balancing China's influence, is warmly welcomed by a Burmese regime delighted that yet another neighboring country is willing to leave democracy and human rights off of the bilateral agenda. As the Indian Ambassador recently told the COM and other diplomats: "India's overriding concern is a good relationship with this (Burmese) government; democracy... is secondary." End Comment.  
Martinez